The rise of the (non-)subject - Blaumachen



Submitted by woland.bm on February 28, 2012

Copied to clipboard

*'A spectre is haunting Europe — the spectre of the hooded rioter. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: The British prime minister David Cameron and the General Secretary Aleka Papariga**[1]**, the Italian foreign secretary Roberto Maroni, Adonis**[2]** and Takis Fotopoulos, Italian COBAS and German police officers.'*

From ***rioter.info***

The Sunday of 12th February was one of those historical moments when a capitalist society's contradictions come together in time and space, break out explosively and a new reality is produced. Class struggle renews its dynamic and this new dynamic becomes its new internal limit that it must overcome. What matters is not the event itself (no single event alone matters decisively in terms of the revolution), but its role in the historical process of the (non-)subject's emergence in the current conjuncture.

Sunday was expected by everyone, in contrast to December 2008. In the past few months the whole of Europe waited for a social explosion appropriate to the situation in Greece. It was regarded as the chronicle of an anticipated death and, after several political manoeuvres, it was announced by the media for Sunday 12th February (a perfect historical irony)[3] and given the title 'vote on Memorandum no. 2'. Nobody did anything to stop it, nobody could do anything, despite how much they may have wanted to, as an article from a new 'bitter friend' of 'contemporary Gavroches'[4] shows. This explosion had the characteristics of the transitional period we are in, the 'era of riots', and its content was the result of the impasse faced today by the structuring of capital in a world scale, while at the same time intensifying it (Greece is a condensed expression of the acuteness of this impasse).

Every significant event of the class struggle is immersed within the entirety of historically determined contradictions of the present in any capitalist society, and appears always in a specific form, fetishised and multiply mediated[5]. At the moment, in Greece, largely because of its very significant recent *political* history, this conflict necessarily takes the form of a political conflict (in complete contrast to August 2011 in London, for example, as the era of riots cannot but be concretised in the local-historical specificities of every social formation). The State's announcement of the coming social explosion (or the first in a 'chain' of explosions) was a political one and in this sense it was also its integration as a necessary explosion within the reproduction of capitalist society. This is a disciplinary, repressive integration, in the context of a state of emergency. It is integration 'by exclusion'. Subsequently, the state, after the return to normality and its victory, was obliged to criminalise certain practices of the 'hooded protesters',

in order to temporarily manage the inescapable consequences of events. The state's discourse is totalising, it prohibits any other opinion: *Nobody can be (or say that they are) on the side of the 'hooded rioters', let alone admit that they are one of them and endeavour to speak publicly about last Sunday's acts.*

'Resistance against the memorandum', as the situation was named politely, could not have been without the appearance of the current limit of trade unionism. The 48-hour general strike was indeed monumental, as it revealed in all its majesty the ultimate death of the labour movement: Nobody cared about it, not even those who receive a share of surplus value (real surplus value, capitalist profit), through the racket whose (hereto formally recognised) sideline is to occasionally announce general strikes. Although tertiary union leaders are still exclusively *socially legitimised* to announce general strikes, they are nowhere to be seen, nonexistent. Promptly informed that unionism is a thing of the past, they are now looking for a new venture (possibly a good, if high risk, investment opportunity might be insurance protection against demonstrations, as newly proposed legislation requires organisers to pay for any damages). That the labour movement can no longer be seen among the forms and practices of a conflict where the existence of a basic wage is itself at stake indicates the extent to which the wage demand is now excluded from capitalist reproduction. At the same time this officially-absent labour character of the proletarian movement is important for the convergence of the impasse of demand struggles with the coming process of abolishing capitalist society. It is a conflictual encounter, a process of historical production.

On Sunday the crowd was massive with an interclass composition both among 'hooded rioters' and other protesters. This was manifested in the wide participation in clashes against the police and their almost universal acceptance. Not a single person (not even their trade union) could be found that evening *in the square* that would defend the police for their role. No 'peacekeepers' of the movement could be found this time, as last summer; the only person to defend them was the representative of the party of Order, the would-be prime minister[6]. The police, in general terms, is always the capitalist class in fighting position against the proletariat. In this particular conjuncture, however, it is the material expression of a specific strategy of capital within the Greek social formation: for the second phase of restructuring to be imposed, *the Greek state must lose its autonomy, it must now integrate organically within a wider coalition (EU)* and be officially demoted in the internal hierarchy, with all that entails for capitalist competition and the fortune of the petit bourgeois strata. Attacking the police is of course a necessary break towards overcoming the limits of 'dialogue' with the state, negotiations on the price of labour power or any other 'right'. In the present moment, however, this could also be an expression of, among other things, the conflict between petit bourgeois strata and the state, which is driving them to the ground. As we have clearly seen in Egypt in 2011, attacking the repressive forces of the state does not necessarily entail questioning the most fundamental capitalist community, the nation[7], or the real gods, money, and property. This is why many former or new 'indignants' took part in clashes and in many cases their combative practice was accompanied by their respect for 'people's property' and by calling the police 'traitors', 'German-guards' or 'Turks', who 'should be with us and not against us'. Even in the midst of clashes, and particularly because of the unprecedented numbers that engaged in them, this Sunday could not but contain the strong 'national' and 'popular' element inevitably produced throughout the 'struggle against the memorandum'.

Beyond the interclass participation that was necessary for a mass confrontation with police and the support it received, an important element of this Sunday, about which the state and all the champions of Culture[8] went rabid, was the looting and burning of shops and other buildings.

Having appeared on a massive scale in December 2008, this practice now came back, after the cessation prompted by the Marfin incident[9] in May 2010, as the class struggle is a chain reaction constituting its own dynamic. The burning of buildings was also the result of the special political form that class struggle takes in Greece. On one hand the police had to protect the parliament aggressively and push the main mass of demonstrators into adjacent streets; on the other hand the weight of political history does not allow the Greek state to further raise the level of repression and become blatantly dictatorial (banks or tanks) even now that the emergency situation is so serious. Throughout the period of restructured capitalism (in Greece it begins around 1996) the transformation of the police into an army of occupation in the urban environment is the element that has allowed the bourgeois state to remain democratic while severely repressing the active sections of the proletariat. Through the decade of 2000 traditional conflicts with police became impossible, to the extent that police could not be warded off by the dynamic minorities who fought in the streets. Consequently, in the student movement of 2006-07, repelled by police, the young precarious proletariat channelled its rage against Athens buildings, and by 2008 every business owner realised that they had to increase spending on securing their properties from the raids of the dangerous classes. In the beginning of the EU-IMF memorandum period, the encounter of those practices with one of the last bursts of a sort of union movement resulted in the Marfin incident. Social violence was marginalised and repressed by all political formations for about a year. In the interclass movement of the squares, however, the question of violence re-emerged as an internal contradiction of the movement, as the new round of measures was even tougher and 'the practices of riot' surrounded the squares, culminating on 28-29 June 2011. It was then becoming evident that growing sections of the population tended to engage in clashes against the police.

The section of the proletariat that torches buildings and loots is a product of the neoliberal period, and particularly of the recent period that led to the crisis. All those who talked of incidents that only involved the social margins of France in November 2005, of 'thugs who attack Paris student marches' in March 2006; of a 'metropolitan insurrection, one of those that occur every now and then but go off like fireworks, while what really matters is the *labour movement*' in December 2008, they all found it a little difficult when London exploded in August 2011. This section of the proletariat cannot stop the production process from the inside (at least not yet), so it acts at the level of the circulation of goods and services. *The emerging (non-)subject is simultaneously subject and non-subject, because of its historically-defined relation between integration and exclusion from the process of value production.* The crucial matter is not the production of a quantitative increase of the lumpen proletariat, but that of an increased lumpenisation of the proletariat – a lumpenisation that does not appear as external in relation to waged labour but as its defining element. Precarity, the constant 'in-and-out', produces a (non-)subject of the (non-)excluded, since inclusion increasingly tends to be by exclusion, especially for those who are young. It is a dynamic, a continually regenerated movement. We are not only referring to the radical exclusion from the labour market, but mainly to the exclusion from whatever is regarded as 'normal' work, 'normal' wage, 'normal' living. In an environment that produces surplus populations and violent attacks on the historically defined value of labour power, the much-anticipated 'subject' loses the ground beneath its feet. There is no 'subject' without a distinctly given 'objectivity' that allows it to lead the life of a subject. In the crisis of restructured capitalism the ground (anchoring on the wage relation) is lost together with the oxygen (the ability to demand better living standards). *The emerging (non-)subject appears simultaneously as a subject without objectivity and as a condensation of objectivity in the form of its dissolution.* Those who are already trapped in the precarity-exclusion continuum invaded a movement that still tends to invoke 'normal' employment and a 'normal' wage; and the (non-

)subject's invasion was successful, because the movement had already been invaded by capital's continual bombardment on 'normal' employment and the 'normal' wage. This whole situation produces destructive practices as a rift in the movement of the proletariat, pushing capital to intensify the repressive aspect of its reproduction as a relation and to keep trying to raise the rate of exploitation further and more violently.

With Sunday's practices (the practices of riot) these particular sections of the proletariat are becoming, within the reproduction of capitalist society, an aggravating factor for the crisis. The (non-)subject's role reflects the revolution produced in this cycle of struggles, which is the abolition of all mediations of value, namely of all current social relations, and not the workers seizing power. The horizon of (this period's) revolution is not the revolutionary programme that awaits the coming of that 'subject' which will inevitably have to play the central role. Productive workers, despite their special role, are not produced in this cycle of struggles as a separate revolutionary subject that will lead the process of transformation of capitalist society into a 'society of labour'; the core concern of the revolution will not be the 'management of production'. In future, the destructive practices that are emerging today will find their limit in their own reproduction and it will not be possible for them to only involve the destruction of constant capital as a 'loss' or as temporary sabotage. In order to continue life within the struggle, practices will be transformed, forced to question the existence of the means of production *as means of the production of value.* This questioning will not be a monolithic process towards a supposed 'victory', but will encompass all the conflicts that will produce, as ruptures, the abolition of the distinction between production and reproduction, that is the abolition of value and with it the abolition of all the social relations of capital. For the moment, within the crisis of restructured capitalism, the (non-)subject is henceforth becoming an active force. It continually reappears and its practices tend to coexist 'antagonistically' with revindicative practices, while revindicative practices tend to 'emulate' the practices of riot, which unavoidably magnetise them, since 'social dialogue' has been abolished.

In September 2011 we wrote about that point in time: 'What will be important in future events in terms of the crisis and intensification of the class struggle, is the unfolding of the relation between the kind of practices we saw in the UK [August 2011] and those of the "indignants". This relation becomes particularly important because of the fluidity between these two forming subjects (unemployment has entered the core of the wage relation). The delineation of a new limit (the police, class belonging as an external constraint) leads to a new formation that we are attempting to approach by the notion of "riots". "Riots" surround the "indignants'" movements, they encroach into them and eventually penetrate them, producing rifts between the practices of those movements (the first manifestation of this fact was 28-29th June in Greece). The rift's dialectic is working fervently…'. Sunday was an overcoming, in the sense that the practices have now converged, they have come face to face in action. The encounter of these practices is a result of the dynamic produced by the co-penetration between the 'indignants', the 'proletarianised petit bourgeois', the civil servants, the youth, the precarious/unemployed. The dialectical movement of these practices is already in process. However, this dialectic will not develop in a vacuum; it is also immersed in the entire dynamic of the class struggle: 'The four-hundred-euro wage is not related to the cuts in pharmacy profits, or to the benefit cuts in public enterprises and banks, or to pension cuts, or to the opening up of closed trades, or to anything that drives unionists and workers into occupations, demonstrations and long-term strikes. When all of the above have reached the kind of limits they claim, then what precisely could those that have no hope of survival do? The youths in run-down neighbourhoods who frequent the sports clubs owned by untaxed shipping magnates hate the centre of Athens and its pretty lights. The Capital's young unemployed are desperate and prepared to resist being given the leprosy of the

social margins. We talk to them about solidarity. Rubbish. Nobody is ready to make the smallest sacrifice [...] so that the twenty-somethings of Greece can get a few Euros more.'[10] These practices belong to fluid and continually reconfigured subjects formed by today's class struggle. In the context of every crisis where realised profit is not enough to breathe life into the immense mass of past crystallised labour, the more the proletariat is squeezed, it becomes all the more fragmented. In the present conjuncture, however, whose core contains the expulsion of demand struggles from capital's reproduction, a dynamic which was an integral part of the entire former period, the crisis' dynamic is now transformed into a dynamic of crisis of the wage relation itself. As the second phase of restructuring is implemented and *informal labour* becomes the leading tendency of capital's blind force, it does not seem at all easy for capital to manage the necessary-for-reproduction qualitative distinction between the 'integrable' strata of the proletariat and the surplus population. This distinction, the ranking and ordering of labour power, is a structural element of every period of capital, although today the crucial elements are that, firstly, the excluded section tends to become larger and prefigures a time when it will comprise a significant part of the population, and secondly, the distinction between inclusion and exclusion is now entirely contingent.

Any prediction is dangerous, since the condensation of historical time contains an element of unpredictability and the creation of multiple ruptures. The momentous turn towards the 'national question' presented as necessary for the reproduction of the current structuring of capital raises the possibility of a left or fascistoid 'national' counter-revolution, which of course cannot enjoy the stability (national-socialist integration into the reproduction of capital within the bounds of a national social formation) of the fascisms of the past. This can be produced as necessary when the moment of last resort comes from the vantage point of capital, which is forced to function under a 'political economy of risk'. The appropriation of riot practices and the continually reproduced state of war in which the proletariat is forced to make any demands, together with the whole squeeze on the working/unemployed population, will all play a role towards adopting practices of the (non-)subject of the (non-)excluded. The only thing certain is that Sunday's important event is only one of a series, forecast to be dense and keep the nights bright.

blaumachen and friends, February 2012

---

[1] The General Secretary of the Communist Party of Greece.

[2] MP of the far-right party LAOS, now Minister of Maritime Trade under the Papadimos coalition.

[3] 12th February is the anniversary of the Varkiza Pact, which initiated the end of the civil war in 1945. The Communist Party signed to order communist guerrillas to give up arms, an act which enabled their subsequent massacre by the state army.

[4] The well-known leftist politician, Alekos Alavanos, wrote: 'As long as the powers of the left remain alienated from the younger generation, as long as "overthrow" remains a tired stereotype and does not translate into a revolutionary plan and political conflict, these phenomena will become increasingly frequent and diffuse. If Gavroche of *Les Miserables* was at Syntagma last night, he wouldn't be in the closed blocs of party youth; he would be burning banks and cinemas with his friends.' http://konserbokoyti.blogspot.com/2012/02/blog-post_2450.html.

[5] Also see the text ‘Without you, not a single cog turns…’, http://libcom.org/library/without-you-not-single-cog-turns%E2%80%A6, where we discuss the political form in which the conflict between practices of different sections of the proletariat is expressed in Greece.

[6] The president of the neoliberal-conservative New Democracy party, Antonis Samaras, stated the next day: ‘Those thugs should know that, when the time comes, I will take their hoods off.’

[7] The nation as a concept registers the contradictory class unity of any given capitalist society. Through its ideological apparatuses, the state transforms, renders socially legitimate, the class interests of capital, presenting them and setting them to work as national interests. State, nation and capital are facets of a single class power: capitalism.

[8] The burning of *Attikon* cinema, one of Athens’ historic buildings, caused outrage among them.

[9] When Marfin bank was firebombed by rioting protesters, three workers, who had been forced to work behind the shutters on a general strike day, died in the fire.

[10] *Cinema Inferno*, by A. Psarra, http://www.rednotebook.gr/details.php?id=4858 (in Greek)